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SOCIAL The Man Who KSTAT

# Helms of the CIA: Invisible man

**The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA.** By Thomas Powers. 393 pages. Knopf. \$12.95.

The writer on intelligence affairs faces many of the same difficulties as the intelligence officer. The information he receives may be wrong or incomplete or self-serving. Even if every bit of it is accurate, he may still be lacking that final piece, the last fact, that could change the picture's focus and meaning. Worse, he may not know there is anything missing at all.

Thomas Powers, in his introduction to this solid, insightful study of the Central Intelligence Agency and the man who headed it for seven crucial years, admits encountering a "chronic incompleteness" as he attempted to piece together his account of the CIA's activities over the years. In a fascinating passage describing the personality types who inhabit the shadowy world of espionage — types who are not of a piece, as might be imagined by an outsider, but who are often professionally and personally cool or even hostile to one another and whose clashes have shaped much of the CIA's history — Powers consciously or unconsciously gives an echo of his own difficulties in writing about them. Here is his distinction between the spy and the analyst:

"Whereas spies are obsessed with the missing pieces, the analysts are devoted to patterns. The spy (and the counterintelligence specialist, whose mentality is that of the spy cubed) is haunted by the possibility he has been denied the one clue which explains all. The analyst is convinced the pattern will always jump the gap."

While researching his book, Powers no doubt shared the spy's obsession with missing pieces; as a writer he certainly was compelled to adopt the analysts' faith in patterns in order to synthesize what he had been able to learn. (There's no reason to think he found any occasion to identify with the third basic type he identifies, whom he calls the adventurers. Embodied by Allen W. Dulles, the only man who served longer than Helms as CIA director, the adventurers dominated the agency's early years. Their spirit was "aggressive, enthusiastic, and too often morally careless," Powers writes. "The adventurers thought of the world as being infinitely plastic; they thought they could do anything with funds and a broad okay from the top.")

Ultimately, of course, it is the analyst's role the writer must fall back on. His judgment and instincts must in the end fill in for the missing puzzle pieces, just as the reader has only his judgment and instincts to assess the writer's.

An example is the continuing question of who authorized CIA attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. The record as established by Senate investigators and by his own researches, contains no documentary evidence to prove that the attempts were ordered by the Kennedy administration. Yet Powers, properly making an informed guess that would have been inappropriate for an official inquiry, speculates convincingly that the attempts would not have been made without presidential sanction.

Powers's researches were, of course, helped immeasurably by the flood of CIA secrets that has been released in recent years. The Senate report is only one book on a shelf that now includes several by disaffected CIA officers such as Victor Marchetti, Philip Agee, Frank Snepp and John Stockwell. The disclosures of recent years have given a far clearer picture than was ever available before of the agency's activities and methods.

The exposures help the investigator not only by their own mass of detail, but also because they prompted many loyalists to reveal additional facts that might better explain and justify agency actions. Helms and other past and present CIA officials obviously discussed matters rather candidly with Powers that they would never have spoken of if their adversaries hadn't done so first.

Indeed, Powers accumulated so much detail it occasionally overwhelms his ability to organize it. On the whole, though, the story is well told. Written with balance and with fairness, it may be the best single history of the CIA to appear so far. Powers is particularly good at explaining the attitudes and reasoning processes involved in the intelligence business; the passage quoted above on the differences between the spy and the analyst is one example, and there are many others.

The author's attempt to portray Helms, the first career CIA officer to rise to direct the agency and the man who bore the brunt of disillusioned criticism when the 1970s revealed past excesses, is less successful. Helms slides in and out of focus, never coming quite clear as a personality — though this isn't entirely the author's fault; clearly, a lot of people who knew Helms much better than Powers did couldn't make him out, either. What does emerge with some clarity — and not without some surprises for the reader — is a picture of Helms's beliefs and values.

Not only as director but throughout his career, Helms was the "pure" intelligence officer. He was on the other side from the flamboyant political operators, Powers reports, not because of any moral scruples but because he believed anything that made the agency visible would undermine its chief purpose: collecting other nations' secrets and protecting its own. It's ironic,

in a sense, that he stood in the target circle when critics zeroed in on agency excesses.

But in another sense, Helms was a proper target. He symbolized not an intelligence agency out of control, but political leadership that had slipped off the moral rails. For Helms did the bidding of his political superiors even when it ran contrary to his own judgments on what would be in the agency's or the nation's interests. Helms remained convinced, even when he himself was faced a charge of perjury before a Senate committee (he finally pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of failing to testify "fully and completely"), that he had behaved properly and honorably throughout. Powers demonstrates persuasively, though not without sympathy for Helms, that the real issue of his career was political misuse of the CIA — misuse which Helms not only did not prevent, but did not even try to resist.

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